

This lesson plan is suitable for upper KS2/lower KS3 students. It explores the narrative poem 'The Hero' by Siegfried Sassoon. This is an angry, ironic, poem that uses the fear of one young soldier to illustrate the futility of war.

Students explore the rhythm of the poem, which is in iambic pentameter, the concept of what it means to be a hero, the language of the poem, its characters and story and – most importantly – the strong contrasts it presents.

Students will experience speaking aloud, mime, freezes, thought-tracking, improvisation, tableaux and, finally, they will give a mini performance of the poem. It's a powerful and inspirational session.

The lesson can be completed in 75 minutes and the resulting performance given on topic days or in assembly.

SAY: Let's create our image first.

ASK: What image would best represent the character of the Colonel?

- Select a volunteer to create that image and represent the Colonel. Place them at the front.

ASK: Do you think he writes/signs a lot of letters? How do you think the Colonel really feels about writing all of the letters home? (Sad, bored, angry) Does he tell the truth? What could the Colonel be really thinking about signing the letters? Find ONE WORD.

- Select 2 or 3 people to stand behind the Colonel and say these words aloud. Remember who you are, what your words are, and where you stand!

ASK: How powerful is it? Can you understand the contrast between what the character of the Colonel is feeling and what he might say out loud to other people? Thank 'COLONEL' and speakers, and ask them to sit down for now.

SAY: Now let's explore the character of BROTHER OFFICER. (An army man)

ASK: What image would best represent the character of Brother Officer?

- Select a volunteer to create that image and represent Brother Officer. Place them at the front.

ASK: In the poem what does he say to Mother? **Does he tell the truth?** (No) What do you think he's really thinking or feeling? How does he feel about Jack? Is there a clue in the poem? Find ONE WORD that expresses how Brother Officer really feels.

- Select 2 or 3 people to stand behind Brother Officer and say these words aloud. Remember who you are, what your words are, and where you stand!

ASK: How powerful is it? Can you understand the contrast between what the character of Brother Officer is really thinking and what he's saying to Mother? Is he being fair to Jack? Is he being brotherly? Thank 'BROTHER OFFICER' and speakers, and ask them to sit down for now.

SAY: Finally, let's explore the character of JACK.

ASK: What image would best represent the character of Jack? Allow longer discussion!

- Select a volunteer to create that image and represent Jack. Place them at the front.

ASK: **Is Jack a hero?** Is he really just frightened? **What does Sassoon say about Jack in the poem?** What happens to Jack? What do you think Jack's really thinking or feeling? ONE WORD.

- Select 2 or 3 people to stand behind Jack and say these words aloud. Remember who you are, what your words are, and where you stand!

ASK: How powerful is it? Can you understand the contrast between what the character of Jack is feeling, how he's portrayed, and what his Mother believes about him?

Thank 'JACK' and speakers, and ask them to sit down for now.

SAY: The contrast of what the characters are thinking or feeling, and what they are saying to others represents how the people at home believed that the war was glorious, but the soldiers knew it was not. It's truth versus fiction. The ignorance of those at home contrasting with the reality of war for soldiers like Siegfried Sassoon.

THE HERO by Siegfried Sassoon

'Jack fell as he'd have wished,' the Mother said,
And folded up the letter that she'd read.
'The Colonel writes so nicely.' Something broke
In the tired voice that quavered to a choke.
She half looked up. 'We mothers are so proud
Of our dead soldiers.' Then her face was bowed.

Quietly the Brother Officer went out.
He'd told the poor old dear some gallant lies
That she would nourish all her days, no doubt.
For while he coughed and mumbled, her weak eyes
Had shone with gentle triumph, brimmed with joy,
Because he'd been so brave, her glorious boy.

He thought how 'Jack', cold-footed, useless swine,
Had panicked down the trench that night the mine
Went up at Wicked Corner; how he'd tried
To get sent home, and how, at last, he died,
Blown to small bits. And no one seemed to care
Except that lonely woman with white hair.